



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



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STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PAHO/WHO STAFF ASSOCIATION

The Staff Association presentation to the 124th Session of the Executive Committee is made possible by a decision taken by the Executive Committee at its 80th Session in 1978. The objective of this presentation is to convey to the Executive Committee Members the point of view of the Staff Association on matters that are directly or indirectly related to staff members and to the Organization. The issues covered in this document were discussed during the XVIII Council Meeting of the Staff Association, which took place in Mexico, D.F., 9-13 November 1998, and relate to the role of the Staff Association; a quest for partnership; concerns of the Professional Staff; concerns of the General Service Staff; and general concerns of staff.

The Staff Association would like to request the support of the Executive Committee Members for its proposals.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
1. Introduction.....	3
2, The Role of the Staff Association.....	3
3. A Quest for Partnership	4
4. Concerns of the Professional Staff.....	5
5. Concerns of General Services Staff.....	6
6. General Concerns of Staff.....	6
7. Conclusion.....	7

1. Introduction

We, the officers of the PAHO/WHO Staff Association, have the privilege and the responsibility to make this presentation to the 124th Session of the Executive Committee, as we have been doing annually since 1978. The purpose of these presentations has been, throughout the years, to share with the Committee the aspirations and concerns of our membership, and to report on the status of staff-management relations from the Association's perspective. The Staff Association is pleased to report that a constructive relationship between the Association and the Administration continues to be built through a mature dialog based on the premise that, while viewpoints may differ from time to time, there is a willingness on both sides to seek common ground and reach reasonable and workable agreements. As an example, last year the Director agreed to establish the Office of Ombudsman. This was warmly welcomed by the Staff Association, as mediation in conflicts was a longstanding request of staff.

Individually and collectively, we are very sensitive to the fact that our true employers are the peoples of the Americas who, through their elected representatives, determine our conditions of employment. Although sometimes they may seem very much removed – geographically and otherwise – from our daily work, it is to them we are committed to serve, and we do so with a great sense of pride.

Equity in health is the core principle of the Organization's quest for all peoples in the Americas – as has oftentimes been expressed by our Director, Sir George Alleyne. However, we strongly believe that the pursuit of equity should permeate not just policy statements and project formulation, but also our institutional endeavors and daily practices. It is with this concept of equity in mind that we share with you the aspirations and concerns of our membership.

2. The Role of the Staff Association

The Staff Association has many challenges ahead of it to make it more efficient in its defense of the rights of staff. It is devoting time and effort to train staff representatives so that they can provide more expertise in the different areas of staff matters related to conditions of employment such as salaries, job classification, pensions, insurance, staff rights against adverse actions, etc. This ability to provide help will allow staff members to feel a certain sense of confidence that ultimately reflects on their contribution to the Organization. The Association will also increase its efforts to defend the rights of individual staff who might be affected by instances of abuse of power. This is key to ensuring equity in the treatment of staff, but equity is also a concern when dealing with issues of compensation.

3. A Quest for Partnership

We are living in a culture of change, not just in the Americas but in the world at large. We are all experiencing changes happening at a speed unknown to us before—the old power structures (top-to-bottom) are being gradually replaced by others that privilege bottom-to-top social constructs to ensure greater justice, harmony and equilibrium in fostering democracy.

In PAHO and in WHO, a dynamic process of change is taking place with a view to providing progressively better services to the peoples we serve. The Staff Association believes that this process of change can be brought about fairly and that the ensuing economies may produce real benefits for the Organization. To rethink in depth and streamline all of our technical, administrative and financial processes is a must, and to do so quickly, but thoroughly, is also a must. However, enlightened management practice dictates that profound change needs to be rooted not in the perception of truth by those at the top, but in truth itself. To achieve such depths of analysis, the search for truth requires the input of **all**.

The Staff Association believes that a true partnership can be built with the Administration to optimize the use of resources and enhance the product provided by the Organization to the countries. Staff want to provide a valuable input based on their unique expertise in a wide range of technical and administrative matters while at the same time noting that improvements can be made to the conditions under which they work.

Without attempting here to be exhaustive, the following is a list of areas of change that require a bottom-up analysis approach:

- Make a more active use of telecommunications resources to expedite contacts and eliminate restrictions that increase costs unnecessarily.
- Streamline administrative costs, doing away with many limitations that are imposed at a higher cost than the economies they produce.
- Introduce mechanisms to generate more competition in the procurement of products and services outside of the Organization, including leasing and purchasing of real estate, contracting travel agencies and printing.
- Introduce the option of flexible working conditions that include a broader range of flexible hours, job sharing, early retirement schemes, and part-time jobs as an incentive to recruit, retain and streamline the staff complement without the need to

enter into costly reduction-in-force processes that end up consuming more resources than the benefits they achieve.

- Negotiate conditions of employment that are of mutual benefit to the staff and to the Administration. The Staff Association has experience in technical and administrative issues and can be a useful resource in how to streamline costs in these areas. The empowerment of staff, by incorporating them into a true partnership with a voice in the daily operations of the Organization, should not be seen as a threat but rather as a valuable input.

4. Concerns of the Professional Staff

This session of the Executive Committee will consider, among other issues, the compensation provided to professional staff. Resolutions were recently adopted by the Executive Board of the World Health Organization after the passage of the corresponding actions of the United Nations General Assembly, on a recommendation from the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC). The document notes that the compensation offered to staff is calculated in line with established principles. In the case of the professional staff, the principle that is claimed as being applied is the Noblemaire principle, that aligns the compensation for professional staff to that of the national civil service offering the best compensation package in the world. After many years of an intense debate on the application of the principle, in 1997 the International Civil Service Commission came to the conclusion that the Noblemaire principle was not being followed.

It is noted that professional salaries have been the same for many years with no real increase in compensation. Some United Nations organizations indicate that recruitment is difficult nowadays because the salary offered is no longer competitive.

In its 1998 Annual Report, the International Civil Service Commission itself acknowledged that the gap between the current comparator (the United States Civil Service) and the best paid civil service in the world (the German Civil Service) is 8.5%. In addition to this, a component of the professional salary is the Post Adjustment, that in the case of Washington, D.C., is set differently than that of New York. This is one of the few cases in the world where there is a distinction between two cities within the same country. This difference between Washington and New York is an unnecessary aggravation to staff members stationed in Washington, as it has a negative impact on their conditions of employment.

Does the Executive Committee think that this is such equitable treatment of staff?

The Staff Association respectfully requests that the Administration convey to the International Civil Service Commission its support for the staff position that professional salaries should be raised, and that the New York Post Adjustment Index be applied to the entire United States, as is the case of most countries in the world.

5. Concerns of General Service Staff

The Flemming principle governs the establishment of salary scales for the General Service staff. Pay rates are set along the lines of the best prevailing salaries in each duty station. This is a fair and equitable system, which has come under attack over the past 18 years because, in a few instances, General Service salaries overlap those of professional staff. The simple reason for this is that the system to compensate General Service and the system to compensate professional staff are different.

General Service staff have suffered a series of reductions in their pensionable remuneration since 1981. General Service staff in the field face distressing situations when currency devaluation comes about because General Services salaries are set in local currencies and thus the rate of exchange directly affects their pensions. In our Region, General Service staff have suffered the so-called “income inversion” phenomenon and some are living beneath the poverty line, often after 20, 25 and even 30 years of service with PAHO.

Does the Executive Committee think that this is equitable treatment of staff?

The Staff Association respectfully requests that the Administration convey to the International Civil Service Commission its support for the staff position that the pensionable remuneration of the General Services should be kept at an adequate level, that there are more cases of staff that have been affected by negative changes than staff that are receiving high pensions, and that an equitable formula needs to be devised to protect all staff from adverse changes at a time in their lives when they need their income the most.

6. General Concerns of Staff

We welcome the introduction of the new staff evaluation system (PPES) and see it as a first step towards an objective evaluation of staff performance. We note that PPES is a flexible tool that allows the Organization to change and adapt work plans to the needs of today’s work. But we are also aware that for this tool to be effective, the Classification System needs to be reviewed so that post descriptions are modernized and aligned to the flexible evaluation system, as evaluation and classification are intimately linked. It is necessary to match a flexible development of work programs with a flexible determination of the grade assigned to each post.

Professional staff are concerned that the PAHO Post Classification is not fully aligned with that of WHO. Part of the transparency in management is offering staff fair compensation and an environment that will ensure that returns from staff are optimized. The input of staff is necessary in the development of a sound Post Classification System.

A longstanding request of staff is that a Joint Staff/Administration Classification Committee be set up to review post grading and to reclassify posts as needed. But so far, PAHO staff do not have access to a joint development mechanism of this type, as is the case in WHO Geneva.

Does the Executive Committee think that this is equitable treatment of staff?

7. Conclusion

In short, the Staff Association believes that a real partnership between the Administration and Staff will only be sustainable through a continuous dialogue between the two parties. A contract of trust has been built up throughout the past years, which will surely be strengthened by future cooperation. We respectfully ask for the support of the Executive Committee Members for the staff positions we have presented above.